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The preventable deaths from drowning...New York

New York

1872

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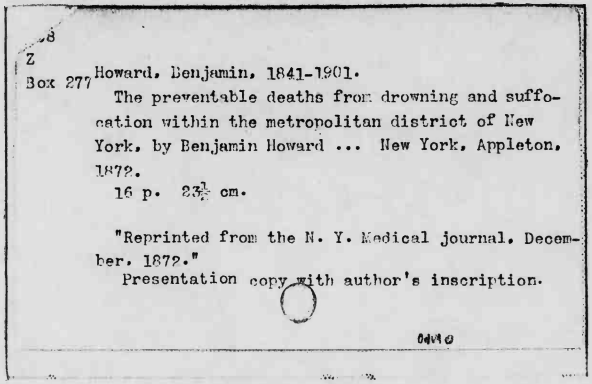

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# THE PREVENTABLE DEATHS

FROM

# DROWNING

WITHIN THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK.

With the Compliments of the Author.

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BY

BENJAMIN HOWARD, A. M., M. D.

*With Report upon the Paper by the New York Academy of Medicine.*

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,
549 & 551 BROADWAY.
1872.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

NEW MEDICAL WORKS IN PRESS.

I.

*A TREATISE*

ON

OVARIAN TUMORS,

THEIR PATHOLOGY, DIAGNOSIS, AND TREATMENT,

WITH REFERENCE ESPECIALLY TO

OVARIOTOMY.

By E. R. PEASLEE, M. D., LL. D.,

Professor of Diseases of Women in Dartmouth College; one of the Consulting Surgeons to the N. Y. State Woman's Hospital; formerly Professor of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women in the N. Y. Medical College; Corresponding Member of the Obstetrical Society of Berlin, etc., etc., etc.

II.

**On Puerperal Diseases.**

CLINICAL LECTURES DELIVERED AT BELLEVUE HOSPITAL.

By FORDYCE BARKER, M. D., Clinical Professor of Midwifery and Diseases of Women, in the Bellevue Hospital Medical College; Obstetric Physician to Bellevue Hospital; Consulting Physician to the New York State Woman's Hospital, and to the New York State Hospital for Diseases of the Nervous System; Honorary Member of the Edinburgh Obstetrical Society, etc., etc.

III.

**A Treatise on Diseases of the Bones.**

By THOMAS M. MARKOE, M. D., Professor of Surgery in the College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York, etc., etc.

IV.

ON THE

**Treatment of Pulmonary Consumption,**

BY HYGIENE, CLIMATE, AND MEDICINE.

By JAMES HENRY BENNET, M. D.

SECOND EDITION, REVISED AND ENLARGED.

D. APPLETON & CO., Publishers,
549 & 551 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

THE

# PREVENTABLE DEATHS

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# DROWNING AND SUFFOCATION

WITHIN THE

METROPOLITAN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK.

BY

BENJAMIN HOWARD, A. M., M. D.,

NEW YORK,

PROFESSOR OF SURGERY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT; FELLOW OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE; FELLOW OF THE ROYAL MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON; CONSULTING SURGEON TO THE WESTERN DISPENSARY FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN, ETC., ETC.

[*REPRINTED FROM THE N. Y. MEDICAL JOURNAL, DECEMBER*, 1872.]

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June 2, 1920 DA

At a regular meeting of the New York Academy of Medicine, held November 7, 1872, the following report was received from a special committee appointed for the purpose therein designated, and was unanimously adopted by the Academy:

REPORT.

New York, *November* 7, 1872.

The committee to which was referred the paper of Dr. Benjamin Howard, entitled "The Preventable Deaths from Drowning within the Metropolitan District of New York," would respectfully report as the result of its deliberations the following memorandum of a resolution for the consideration of the Academy:

Resolved, *That the insufficient provisions made within the Metropolitan District of New York to save persons from drowning call for some well-considered, vigorous, and immediate action* on the part of the People.

Resolved, *That the Academy will give such aid in exciting public attention and organizing* public effort *as the importance of the subject invites, and the functions of the Academy will allow.*

*Special Committee of the Academy.*

C. R. Agnew, *Chairman*,
Fordyce Barker,
E. R. Peaslee,
A. B. Ball,
Benjamin Howard, *Secretary.*

# THE PREVENTABLE DEATHS FROM DROWNING WITHIN THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK.[1]

THE following paper is intended to be a brief inquiry concerning the mortality from drowning and suffocation within our own city limits, and the means which are employed to diminish it. As introductory to the immediate facts to be presented, it may be well to observe that the possible continuance of individual life, after all its ordinary signs have ceased, is a fact which has become familiar by repeated confirmation. It is equally well known, on the other hand, that, after individual or somatic death, life may linger in some of the parts of the body, as demonstrated by the continuance in them of secretion and growth. In the rattlesnake the secretion of its poison has been observed not only after the death but also after the decapitation of the reptile. We might quote from very high authorities instances in which animals have returned to life after a continuous submersion of two hours; others, in which the same success has been attained after several hours not in the water only, but also under the ice; and still others in which, after exhumation from a recent grave, human beings have been restored to life and health. Whatever undue importance may have been given to some of these curiosities of medical literature, they have certainly helped to quicken such investigations as have led us to the more definite knowledge we now possess. Our practical experience in resuscitation is

[1] Read before the New York Academy of Medicine, October 17, 1872.

confined almost exclusively to cases of apparent death from drowning, in which we know the susceptibility to resuscitation is peculiar. The reason for this peculiar susceptibility may be found chiefly in the absence of those pathological changes common in death from ordinary disease; death in drowning being caused simply by the exclusion of air by the least possible violence until the vital functions have ceased. The possibility of restoration is still further explained by observing the order in which the process of dying in such a case proceeds. Beginning with a diminished excitability of the fibrillæ of the pneumogastric distributed over the air-cells, the cerebrum, medulla oblongata, and the sympathetic in their order lose their susceptibility; the respiratory muscles therefore soon forget to contract, and the lungs become engorged with blood.

As the toxæmia from accumulating carbon becomes more and more intense, organic life slowly retreats from the surface toward the centre, until the final enervation of the heart is complete, and it becomes motionless.

It is thus seen that death is gradually effected by—

1. Cessation of respiration.
2. Superficial asphyxia, or pulselessness.
3. Cardiac asphyxia.

Between each of these stages an interval may occur of shorter or longer duration. During such interval resuscitation may be possible.

Neither from the sufferers themselves nor from the by-standers, can accurate reports of the duration of submersion or of unconsciousness in actual cases of drowning ever be hoped for.

Thorough experimentation has been made, of course, upon animals only. It is impossible, therefore, to fix a limit to the period either of continuous submersion, of unconsciousness, or of apparent death, which will allow or prevent subsequent resuscitation. It is not within the intended scope of this paper to present the physiological aspects of the subject, and we will therefore dismiss this point by giving an opinion based upon the report of the Committee of the Royal Medico-Chirurgical Society of London, the reports of the Royal Humane Society, and the personal experience of the author.



If there be positive evidence that the patient was free from syncope, and has been so submerged as to have inspired no air whatever for more than five minutes, the case is probably hopeless.

If in any case, proper treatment has been continued more than an hour, and no sign of life is yet discoverable, the attendant may cease his efforts at discretion.

The successful cases which have come within the personal knowledge of the author, or have been treated by him, have averaged ten to twenty minutes in the water, and about twenty minutes of subsequent unconsciousness.

The general nature and success of the measures which have been employed in other countries, for the saving of the drowned, will help us to a proper estimate of our own situation and duty in the city of New York.

In Holland, as early as 1768, an ordinance was passed directing rules for the treatment of the drowned to be read in all the churches. In 1774 the Royal Humane Society of London was established, and its example was quickly emulated in many of the principal cities of Europe.

The treatment then was crude; indeed, within the present generation, in addition to injections of tobacco-smoke and warm baths, it included suspension by the heels, or placing the patient face downward across the back of a horse urged into a trot. The only treatment at this moment known to the masses of our country consists in rolling the patient miscellaneously upon the ground, or face downward upon a barrel.

Since the time of the good and great Marshall Hall, and the establishment of the principle that the one-remedy is artificial respiration, an entire change in the treatment has universally prevailed.

To such simplicity is the treatment now reduced, that with a little instruction, it may be applied without delay, by anybody, anywhere, with almost as good results as the case would admit of, under the most favorable circumstances.

Notwithstanding the former questionable character of the treatment, the results appear to have been such as we, by our better methods, might be very glad to emulate to-day in our own city.

Within six years from its formation, the Humane Society of Amsterdam reported the recovery of two hundred persons. Mr. Alexander Johnson, in a report to the Humane Society of London, states that, from 1774 to 1787, a period of thirteen years, eight hundred and ninety-seven instances of resuscitation occurred in London alone. According to the report of Monsieur Pia, the superintendent of the Establishment for the Recovery of the Drowned in Paris, during the sixteen years subsequent to 1772, eight hundred and thirteen persons apparently dead from submersion were completely restored; one hundred and twenty cases only having been treated unsuccessfully.

To give an idea of the good now being accomplished by Humane Societies, we would quote from the Annual Report of the Royal Humane Society of London, published in 1862, from which we find that, during that current year, of one hundred and seventy-three persons treated, one hundred and fifty were fully restored, notwithstanding that twenty-seven of the number had intended suicide; that, during the year just past, the Society reports three hundred cases successfully treated, and sixteen cases of restoration from attempted suicide.

Wherever Humane Societies have existed, it has been shown that of all the lives known to have been imperilled by drowning, the larger number have been saved. By such Associations, science and humanity in this highest type of human effort, have reaped a reward which for completeness and magnitude, has scarcely been equalled in any other department of human philanthropy.

The Metropolitan District of New York, according to the official report of the Board of Health for 1868, from which the following facts are quoted, includes a water-front of about 167 miles, a great part of which is swarmed with persons engaged in active pursuits.

The number of persons who crossed the New York ferries during the year 1867 amounted to an aggregate of about eighty millions. These were transported between forty-five ferry-houses, stations, and docks, upon eighty-three steamboats; the relative number crossing at the respective ferries being as follows:



| NAME OF FERRY. | No. Boats employed. | No. Docks and Ferry Houses. | No. of Passengers transported in 1868. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Union Ferry to Brooklyn | 17 | 10 | 40,000,000 |
| Peck Slip and Grand Street to Brooklyn | 13 | 4 | 4,100,000 |
| Jackson Street to Brooklyn | 1 | 2 | 1,800,000 |
| Houston " " | 3 | 2 | 1,920,000 |
| Tenth Street and Greenpoint | 4 | 2 | 1,500,000 |
| Thirty-fourth Street and Hunter's Point | 5 | 2 | 2,300,000 |
| Ninety-second Street and Hell Gate | 2 | 2 | 125,000 |
| West Forty-second Street and Weehawken | 2 | 1 | 360,000 |
| Spring and Christopher Streets to Fort Lee | 2 | 2 | 780,000 |
| Christopher and Barclay Streets to Hoboken | 10 | 2 | 5,300,000 |
| Pavonia Ferry, foot of Chambers Street | 4 | 1 | 3,390,000 |
| Desbrosses and Cortlandt Streets to Jersey City | 8 | 2 | 13,000,000 |
| Dey Street to North Shore, Staten Island | 3 | 4 | 1,050,000 |
| Liberty Street to Central New Jersey Railroad | 5 | 1 | 2,100,500 |
| Whitehall Street to Staten Island | 3 | 4 | 2,200,000 |
| East River to Bay Ridge | 1 | 3 | ..... |
| Total | 83 | 44 | 79,925,000 |

Notwithstanding the usual precautions for the prevention of accidents, the official report of the Board of Health for the same year states: "The number of deaths in New York alone frequently averages one per day by drowning;" that, "during the years 1863 to 1867 there were no less than one thousand and fifty-nine deaths from this cause in New York, exclusive of suicides."

The following table, compiled from the police records, under the complete and able direction of Dr. Elisha Harris, to whom so much is due in this connection, exhibits the number of cases of drowning for the six months ending October 31, 1867, with results:

| MONTH. | Rescued alive. | Bodies recovered. | Bodies not recovered. | Bathers included in one of the three foregoing classes. | Total. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| May | 13 | 11 | 4 | | 28 |
| June | 5 | 21 | 5 | 4 | 31 |
| July | 15 | 21 | 6 | 4 | 42 |
| August | 17 | 25 | 7 | 6 | 49 |
| September | 14 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 27 |
| October | 18 | 10 | 1 | | 29 |
| Total for 6 months | 82 | 100 | 24 | 15 | 206 |

This, as will be seen, gives an aggregate of 206 cases of drowning within six months.

A table of statistics, more comprehensive than any which has been heretofore published upon the subject, has been kindly prepared for the author by his friend Dr. Charles P. Russell, Registrar of the Metropolitan Board of Health, and includes all the cases of death from Apnœa reported to the Board during the past seventeen years:

| YEAR. | Asphyxia or Suffocation. | Accidental Drowning, or found in Water. | Suicide by Drowning. | Suicide by Hanging. | Execution by Hanging. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1855 | 27 | 186 | 4 | 14 | .. |
| 1856 | 6 | 141 | 3 | 13 | .. |
| 1857 | 34 | 164 | 5 | 10 | 1 |
| 1858 | 57 | 161 | 9 | 11 | 1 |
| 1859 | 110 | 167 | | 10 | .. |
| 1860 | 113 | 185 | 3 | 9 | 2 |
| 1861 | 139 | 204 | 1 | 6 | .. |
| 1862 | 112 | 182 | 3 | 10 | 2 |
| 1863 | 121 | 266 | 2 | 3 | .. |
| 1864 | 107 | 232 | 1 | 8 | .. |
| 1865 | 115 | 175 | 2 | 4 | .. |
| 1866 | 104 | 226 | 5 | 10 | 2 |
| 1867 | 92 | 166 | 3 | 12 | 2 |
| 1868 | 95 | 171 | 6 | 32 | .. |
| 1869 | 53 | 172 | 8 | 20 | .. |
| 1870 | 63 | 181 | 11 | 27 | 2 |
| 1871 | 45 | 187 | 6 | 18 | 1 |
| Total | 1,393 | 3,166 | 72 | 217 | 13 |

From this table we see that during the past seventeen years, from 1855 to 1871 inclusive, the total number of deaths reported in the city of New York from Apnœa, exclusive of executions, numbers 4,848; that, allowing the same ratio for three preceding years, we have an aggregate loss during the past twenty years of 5,700 souls, or more than 285 annually.

What proportion of these deaths were preventable?

This is a question in which the New York Academy is entitled to a special interest, because it is the one Society which by its constitution, is responsible "for the promotion of the public health" of this community.

We will approach the question concerning this rate of mortality by asking first,

What has been done to prevent it?

If the facts to be presented imply blame, we ourselves would be the last to claim exemption.



During this twenty years past, the first step toward an organized effort for the rescue and resuscitation of the drowned was taken in the summer of 1868, when the Sanitary Committee of the Board of Health had referred to it the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That, in view of the large and increasing number of deaths by drowning in the Metropolitan District, as appears from the weekly report of the Registrar of Vital Statistics, the Sanitary Committee be requested to report whether any and what measures can be adopted by this Board to diminish the number of such casualties in the Metropolitan District.

The committee reported that they had carefully examined into the subject referred to, and that "*it appears very desirable not to delay the needed action thereon.*"

After consultation and experiment, a form of apparatus was decided upon consisting of ladder, pole, and rope. These, in sets or parts of sets, were then distributed and put under the charge of the police at the following points as designated:

*List of Places where Apparatus was placed in* 1868.

Pier 1, North River, full set.
Pier 10, North River, pole and ladder.
New Jersey Ferry-House, pole and ladder.
Pier 43, North River, pole and ladder.
Pier 47, North River, full set.
Hoboken Ferry, full set.
Foot of Gansevoort Street, full set.
Foot of Cortlandt Street, full set.
Pier 29, North River, rope.
Pavonia Ferry, full set.
Foot of Harrison Street, full set.
Desbrosses Street Ferry, full set.
Grand Street Ferry, full set, and ladder and pole.
Gouverneur Slip, rope.
Clinton Street, rope.
Rutgers Street, full set.
Catherine Street, full set.
Roosevelt Street, full set.
Pier 24, East River, full set.
Fulton Ferry, full set.
Wall Street Ferry, full set.
Pier 12, East River, pole and rope.
Coenties Slip, ladder and pole, and full set.

South Ferry, full set.
Yonkers, full set.
Astoria, full set.
Hunter's Point, full set.
Greenpoint, full set.
Houston Street, full set.

After two or three months, the Board of Health was compelled to suspend all active measures in this direction in consequence of other more imperative public exigencies, and it has been unable since to resume them. The nature of the measures adopted, and the total means employed during that summer, are given in the latter part of a special report made at the end of that year to the Superintendent, and published in the Annual Report of the Board for 1868. It is as follows:

The means hitherto employed to prevent death from drowning, and but recently inaugurated by your honorable Board, have consisted of one temporary course of instruction on "The Rescue and Resuscitation of Drowned Persons," as above mentioned. These lectures have been attended by 819 policemen, 92 of whom are sergeants. Next, the supply of the Board's rescue apparatus, consisting of ladder, pole, and heaving-line, to twenty-four points at the lower part of the city, and the distribution of printed circulars entitled "Rescue of Drowning Persons." I beg respectfully to submit that the great annual mortality from drowning might suggest the economy of adopting a system of practical instruction for the rescue and resuscitation of drowning persons, which should be constantly maintained and become permanently established. I have the honor to be, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,
BENJAMIN HOWARD, M. D.,
*Assistant Sanitary Inspector.*

From a foot-note at the bottom of the page whence this quotation is taken, we quote: "At the date of printing this report, January 18, 1869, twenty-five persons, during the preceding five months, have been rescued from drowning by the agencies of the Board."

This, as far as we can ascertain, comprises all that has been attempted during the past twenty years to diminish the current mortality from suffocation and drowning within our Metropolitan District.

In order to secure the latest information, a note of inquiry was recently addressed by the author to the chief executive of



the Board, by whom the following note was kindly sent in reply:

BUREAU OF SANITARY INSPECTION, HEALTH DEPARTMENT,
NEW YORK, *September* 14, 1872.

MY DEAR DOCTOR: I have been out of town, otherwise your note would have received earlier attention. In reply to your question, I would say that no active measures are now being taken beyond what was done by the old Metropolitan Board in furnishing an apparatus, with which you are well acquainted, to the several ferries and other convenient places along the water-side, to be used in rescuing persons from the water. So far as I have been able to learn from recent inspection, these are in order and occasionally resorted to, though many prefer a simple boat-hook before any other apparatus.

Truly, etc., E. H. JANES.

In order to exclude as far as possible all sources of error, the author has just made a personal inspection of all the points within the city where rescue-apparatus is reported to have been placed, and put in charge of the police there on duty.

With regard to the police surveillance: Two police-officers only were found who could state where any apparatus on their posts had been placed, or where such of it as remained could be found.

After careful, and in some cases very tedious search, all the apparatus and parts of apparatus of the Board of Health, which could be found, consisted of:

2 framed "Rules for Resuscitation,"
7 ladders,
9 poles,
7 ropes.

Thus the entire arrangements now maintained by the Metropolitan Board of Health within this city comprises less than

9 sets of apparatus,

and these are in great part broken or unfit for use. In no case was there found one set in good order and complete.

In no case was there found any conspicuous notice to attract public attention to the apparatus or to designate its use.

Some of the apparatus which was found had been of great service. The author saw two or three parts of sets which had been several times used successfully in the saving of life. He also saw apparatus which had failed on account of its broken condition, loss of life occurring in consequence.

If the want of apparatus is great, this inspection tour showed that the general need for information upon resuscitation is still greater.

Upon very extensive investigation, not one person from the highest official downward, could be found, who in a drowning casualty would have attempted any thing beyond rolling the unfortunate patient upon the ground, or across a barrel.

Without exception however, information upon the subject seemed to be considered by all classes of great personal importance, and is earnestly desired.

The officer in command of the Harbor Police boat said he was meeting with drowning accidents every few days, and thought if he had possessed the necessary knowledge, he could have restored a good many such persons to life.

This statement was repeated substantially by several other persons about the docks, the statements being accompanied with interesting recitals in evidence.

The rate of mortality from drowning, so high now, as the population increases, must ever tend to be higher.

The causes of this high rate of preventable death from suffocation and drowning which suggest themselves, are chiefly as follows:

1. The public have no recognized source of information concerning rescue and resuscitation.

2. Rescue-apparatus is insufficiently provided and maintained.

3. The members of the Police and Fire Departments, to whom the opportunities of rescue from suffocation and drowning most frequently occur, receive no special instruction to fit them for such emergencies.

4. Life-preservers and fire-escapes are merely articles of merchandise, subject to no authorized surveillance.

5. There is no established means for the proper recognition and reward of heroic effort in the saving of human life, but of animal life only.

We have thus pointed out the peculiar susceptibility to resuscitation which may exist after apparent death from suffocation or drowning. We have shown that the mortality in New York from these causes averages two hundred and eighty-five annually, giving an aggregate for the past twenty years of five thousand seven hundred deaths.



That, in cities where there is an organized system for this purpose, the majority of persons thus imperilled are rescued; that, of those rescued in 1862 by the agencies of the Royal Humane Society of London, ninety-one per cent. were restored to life and health; and that, during the past year, the same Society reports three hundred cases successfully treated, sixteen being saved from attempted suicide.

That, notwithstanding the continued high rate of mortality from these causes in our city, nothing special is being done to prevent it.

Lastly, we submit that in no instance can we discover that plans for the rescue or resuscitation of the drowned have anywhere been persistently carried out in the proper spirit by any municipal body; that, to be successful, such an enterprise must be wholly inspired by philanthropy.

After the reading of the above paper, it was moved by Dr. C. R. Agnew that, in view of the great importance of the paper read by Dr. Howard, it be referred to a special committee for careful consideration, the report to be presented at the next meeting. The President of the Acadamy, Dr. Peaslee, appointed on this committee, Prof. C. R. Agnew, M. D., Prof. Fordyce Barker, M. D., A. B. Ball, M. D., and Prof. Benjamin Howard, M. D., to which, by motion, was afterwards added the name of the President.

At the following regular meeting of the New York Academy of Medicine, held November 7, 1872, the committee presented, through the Secretary of the Academy, the following report:

NEW YORK, *November* 7, 1872.

The committee to which was referred the paper of Dr. Benjamin Howard, entitled "The Preventable Deaths from Drowning within the Metropolitan District of New York," would respectfully report as the result of its deliberations the following memorandum of resolutions for the consideration of the Academy:

*Resolved*, That the insufficient provisions made within the Metropolitan District of New York to save persons from drowning call for some well-considered, vigorous, and immediate action on the part of the people.

*Resolved*, That this Academy will give such aid in exciting public attention and organizing public effort as the importance of the subject invites, and the functions of the Academy will allow.

*Committee.* C. R. Agnew, Fordyce Barker, E. R. Peaslee, A. B. Ball, Benjamin Howard, *Secretary.*

Dr. E. R. Peaslee, the President, wished to repeat, with great emphasis, the fact, as shown in the paper of Dr. Howard, that efforts for the rescue and resuscitation of the drowned had nowhere in the world been successfully carried out by any municipal organization. He desired to call the attention of the Academy especially to this fact, that all past experience in other countries had shown that voluntary organizations alone had been successfully maintained for this object. In this city municipal efforts had been made, and had in a short time utterly failed; now the only thing which remained was the formation of some society for this purpose, corresponding more or less to those which had yielded such noble results in other countries.

On motion, the report of the special committee was unanimously adopted.

An additional motion was then made by Dr. A. C. Post, and adopted by the Academy, that the committee be continued, and be further requested to report to the Academy such measures as they deem best calculated to carry out the suggestions of Dr. Howard's paper.


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INTENTIONAL SECOND EXPOSURE



*Resolved*, That this Academy will give such aid in exciting public attention and organizing public effort as the importance of the subject invites, and the functions of the Academy will allow.

*Committee.* { C. R. Agnew, Fordyce Barker, E. R. Peaslee, A. B. Ball, Benjamin Howard, *Secretary*.

Dr. E. R. Peaslee, the President, wished to repeat, with great emphasis, the fact, as shown in the paper of Dr. Howard, that efforts for the rescue and resuscitation of the drowned had nowhere in the world been successfully carried out by any municipal organization. He desired to call the attention of the Academy especially to this fact, that all past experience in other countries had shown that voluntary organizations alone had been successfully maintained for this object. In this city municipal efforts had been made, and had in a short time utterly failed; now the only thing which remained was the formation of some society for this purpose, corresponding more or less to those which had yielded such noble results in other countries.

On motion, the report of the special committee was unanimously adopted.

An additional motion was then made by Dr. A. C. Post, and adopted by the Academy, that the committee be continued, and be further requested to report to the Academy such measures as they deem best calculated to carry out the suggestions of Dr. Howard's paper.


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